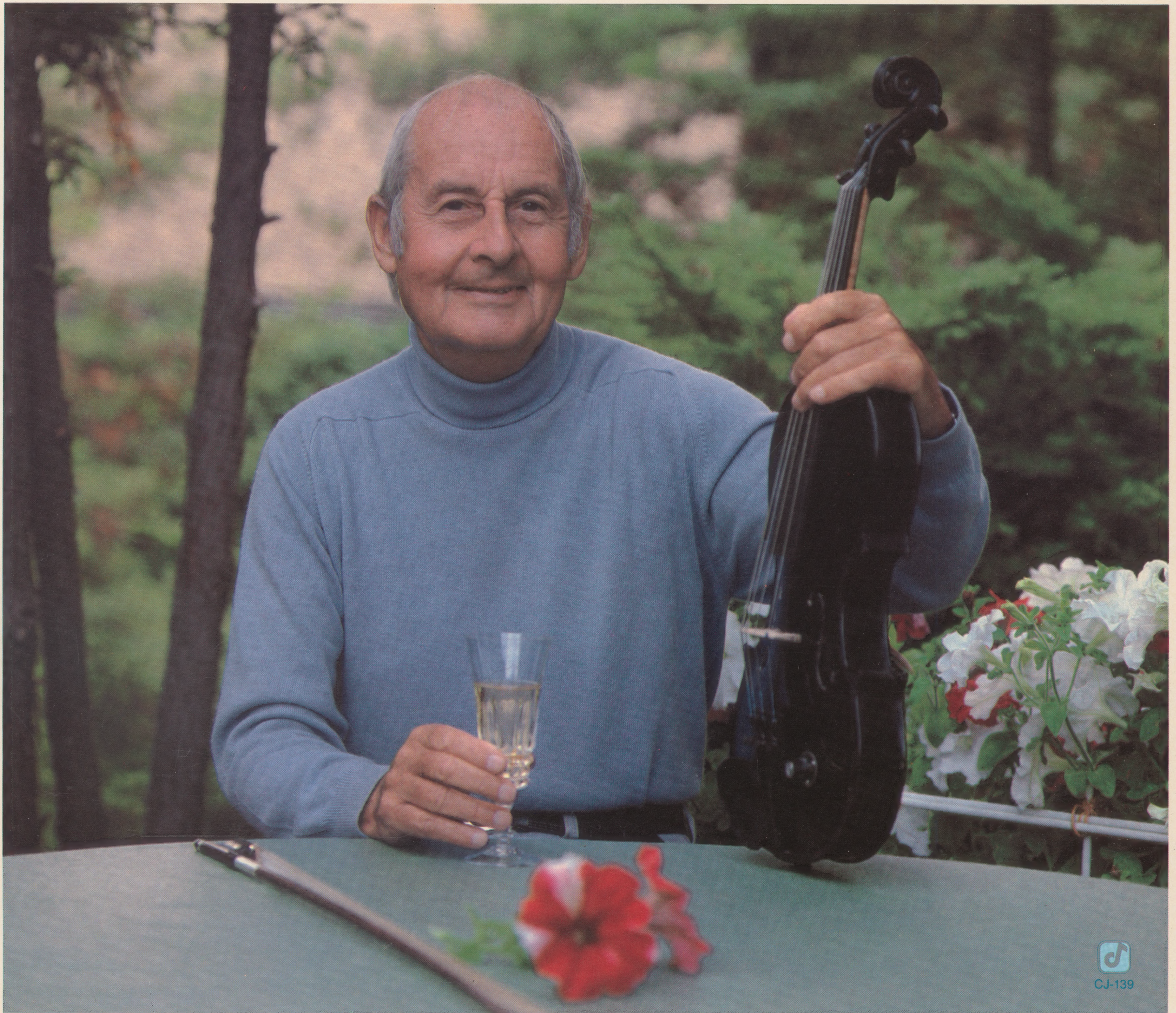


STEPHANE GRAPPELLI

AT THE WINERY





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One night in 1930, or perhaps it was 1931, Stephane Grappelly (that was the way he spelled it in those days) was working at a club called La Croix du Sud (The Southern Cross) in Montparnasse, when a young guitarist named Django Reinhardt dropped by to hear him.

Stephane recalls that he was playing "Any sort of music I could—either on the piano or on saxophone, but preferably on the violin!" The Croix du Sud encounter was casual; it was not until early 1934 that Reinhardt and Grappelly, then both members of an orchestra led by the saxophonist Andre Ekyan, made their first recording date together. Later that year the two men were jamming with the bassist Louis Vola at the Hotel Claridge when a second guitarist, Roger Chaput, joined in.

Charles Delaunay, a foresighted French critic, heard possibilities in the quartet. Reinhardt disliked the idea that his solos were backed by only one guitar (Chaput) while Grappelly's were supported by two guitars. To even the balance he added his brother, Joseph Reinhardt. With Delaunay's help, the newly formed combo was able to negotiate a recording deal. This marked the birth of the Quintet of the Hot Club de France (there was no actual club; it was just a society of dedicated jazz fans).

The group began recording for Ultraphone in December 1934, and from then until the onset of World War II it was an intermittently organized, internationally recognized sensation. Reinhardt, as the more colorful character of the two and a total individualist, was more widely acclaimed than his violinist partner, but few of us who heard the group in those days failed to observe that in Grappelly jazz had acquired a sophisticated, elegant performer, a master of the instrument, at a time when only three jazz violinists, Joe Venuti, Eddie South and Stuff Smith, had gained any prominence at all.

When the war broke out, the Quintet happened to be in London. Django returned to France, but Stephane stayed on in England. One evening in a pub he heard a 20-year-old blind boy named George Shearing playing the accordion. Grappelly and Shearing teamed up, working together often during the next five years. Not long after the war ended, Shearing went off to conquer America and Stephane returned to France and Django.

The great days of the partnership, however, were in the past. There was one reunion for recordings in London in early 1946, using different musicians but the same instrumentation (violin, three guitars and bass). But Django's American tour with Duke Ellington toward the end of that year was not the success it should have been, and Stephane recalls the gypsy guitarist's extreme frustration. "He felt that everyone was against him and that nobody understood him."

Nevertheless, Django was supposedly planning to return to America, this time with Stephane, when death ended the dream. After Django's passing in May of 1953, Stephane continued to work steadily, playing clubs, concerts, radio and TV in France, England and Italy. He

recorded, too, but some of the sessions were pop dates now forgotten. There were a few exceptions, notably his collaborations with such visiting Americans as Ellington, Oscar Peterson, Stuff Smith and John Lewis.

Superstitious numerologist-observers might claim that the change in spelling marked the turnabout in his career. Whatever the reason, it was during the late 1960s and early '70s that Grappelli (sic) made the move from a relatively uneventful life, marked by long hotel stints in France, to a new round of acceptance that soon became world-wide, involving, most valuably, recognition by a new generation in the U.S. He earned a standing ovation at a Carnegie Hall concert in 1974; after that, the deluge—Newport, Montreux, Australia, and increasing demand for pure jazz record dates.

Much of his best work during the past decade has been patterned along lines established back in the Quintet days, with guitars and bass (usually no drums). Of course, the elegance, clarity and lyrical beauty of Stephane's sound will fit into any setting, but it seems to me that the kind of support he receives on the present album is the most sympathetic.

The two British guitarists, John Etheridge and Martin Taylor, are admirable foils for each other and for Stephane. Etheridge can be heard on the right channel, his sound a little suppler and perhaps slightly more laid back at times; on the left is Taylor, the more brittle, with more highs in his tone.

Completing the combo is Jack Sewing, the nimble Dutch bassist, among whose earlier credits is an album recorded with Stephane live at Montreux in 1973.

Most of these unfailingly swinging performances require no further explanation, with a couple of exceptions. *Minor Swing*, by Grappelli and Reinhardt, has a long history: the composers recorded it with the old Quintet in 1937 and Stephane has revived it in many recorded versions over the decades. This one is marked by some stimulating chase work with Etheridge and Taylor alternating.

The Martin Taylor composition *Angel's Camp*, dedicated to a locale in Mark Twain's mining country east of Stockton, Ca. where Stephane has often played, is an intriguing work, based on four and six note phrases, each with a suspenseful three-beat pick-up. The fast-moving bridge contrasts well with the simplicity of the main strain.

Stephane has never sounded more relaxed than on this occasion, nor has a live recording ever achieved more brilliance. Incidentally, if you are wondering how he extended his range to such miraculous extremes on *Taking a Chance on Love* and *Willow Weep For Me*, bear in mind that he had on hand an amplified viola. Hence that beautiful cello-like quality.

Finally, a salute is due to Paul Masson and a comment on the aptness of the Winery as a venue for this happy occasion. Jazz musicians, when they achieve true greatness, age like fine wine. Today more than ever, the music of Stephane Grappelli represents a very special vintage.

—LEONARD FEATHER

STEPHANE GRAPPELLI VIOLIN AND
ELECTRIC VIOLA

JOHN ETHERIDGE GUITAR

MARTIN TAYLOR GUITAR

JACK SEWING BASS

SIDE ONE

1. YOU ARE THE SUNSHINE
OF MY LIFE (4:37)

(Stevie Wonder) Johanan Vigoda, Admin.—Jobete Music Co., Inc.—
Black Bull Music, Inc.—ASCAP

2. LOVE FOR SALE (5:03)

(Cole Porter) Warner Bros. Inc.—ASCAP

3. ANGEL'S CAMP (3:47)

(Martin Taylor) M.L.J. Music

4. WILLOW WEEP FOR ME (4:18)

(Ann Ronell) Bourne Co.—ASCAP

5. CHICAGO (4:45)

(Fred Fisher) Fred Fisher Music—ASCAP

SIDE TWO

1. TAKING A CHANCE ON LOVE (5:23)

(Vernon Duke-Ted Fetter-John Latouche) Miller Music Corp.—ASCAP

2. MINOR SWING (3:45)

(Stephane Grappelli-Django Reinhardt) Jewel Music Pub. Co., Inc.—ASCAP

3. LET'S FALL IN LOVE (4:38)

(Harold Arlen-Ted Koehler) Bourne Co.—ASCAP

4. JUST YOU, JUST ME (9:00)

(Jesse Greer-Raymond W. Klages) Robbins Music Corp.—ASCAP

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Produced by Carl E. Jefferson, President, Concord Jazz, Inc.
Recorded live during "Vintage Sounds" at the Paul Masson Mountain
Winery, Saratoga, California September 1980

Remote recording PER Mobile II

Recording engineer: Phil Edwards

Technical engineer: Jim Hilson

Assistant: Lori Walton

Remixed at PER, San Francisco, California

Remix engineer: Phil Edwards

Mastered by George Horn

Cover photo: David Fischer

Art Direction: Dick Hendler

PRODUCER'S NOTE:

We wish to extend a very special thank you to the Paul Masson Mountain Winery for sponsoring this magnificent "Vintage Sounds" Concert Series and to Jan Wells, Bruce Labadie, Abby Hoffer and P.D. Hoffer for their generous assistance.

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